

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Human development is the combination of people's entitlements and attainments relating to education, health and livelihood. These three areas, taken together, form the everyday experience of 'development' for the people as individuals and as members of a community, state or nation. The concept of human development is a people-centred approach to development where the primary concern is enhancement of human well-being. Human development therefore corresponds to a holistic approach in the process of development.

The Human Development Reports (HDRs) brought out annually by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) since 1990 may be regarded as the first worldwide attempt to look at development in terms of human well being, away from the confines of economic development. Since then, most of the countries have brought out their national as well as sub-national Human Development Reports. India published its National Human Development Report in 2001. Among the States, Madhya Pradesh prepared the world's first sub-national HDR in 1995.

It is in this context that the Government of Meghalaya in collaboration with the Planning Commission, Government of India and UNDP has prepared the first State Human Development Report of Meghalaya. The present Report attempts to assess the achievement of the State in the spheres of human development and to find out ways and means in order to ensure that the basic objective of development – to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and productive lives – is attained.

The rest of the chapter is organised as follows. The next Section 1.2 presents an overview of the Meghalaya Human Development Report. It summarizes the chapters of the Report. Section 1.3 gives a profile of Meghalaya. It outlines the geographic location, topography and areas of strengths and weaknesses of the State. It presents some of the unique socio-economic features of the North Eastern Region in general and of Meghalaya in particular. The problems of development as perceived by the people are also highlighted. This serves as a background against which we evaluate achievements of the state in the sphere of human development.

1.2. The Meghalaya State Human Development Report: An Overview

The Report aims to critically examine certain key components of human development in the state, highlights the achievements to date and describes what else needs to be done to consolidate the gains. Human development is a broad concept and its various dimensions can range from basic needs of health and command over resources to concerns for security and cultural liberty. Successive HDRs published by the UNDP focus on the different dimensions and issues related to human development. However, for Meghalaya it is not possible to address all these issues in the first Report. Therefore, we focus on the dimensions that are universal and basic to human life itself. These key dimensions of human development are health, education and command over resources, i.e. issues of poverty, income and employment.

The Report is organised into 12 chapters. The present **Chapter 1** gives an overview of the first HDR of the State of Meghalaya along with a profile of the State. It outlines the geographic location, topography and areas of strengths and weaknesses of the State. It presents some of the unique socio-economic features of the North Eastern Region in general and of Meghalaya in particular. The problems of development as perceived by the people are also highlighted.

Chapter 2 discusses the concept and measurement of human development. It provides a comparative analysis of the level of human development in terms of the Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender related Development Index (GDI) among the States in India and among the Districts in Meghalaya.

In terms of the HDI, Meghalaya ranks poorly in human development among the States in India. From a rank of 21st in 1981, its position slipped to 24th in 1991 among the 32 States and Union Territories. In 2005, the rank of Meghalaya is 26th out of 35 States and Union Territories. The urban HDI ranking has deteriorated recently. From a rank of 21st in 1981, the ranking of urban Meghalaya improved to 10th in 1991. It slipped down to 22nd position in 2005. While other states have improved their health and educational indicators recently, the same cannot be said for Meghalaya. For instance, in Meghalaya urban IMR was 44 per 1000 live births in 2003. It deteriorated to 46 in 2007 (SRS Bulletins, Vol 39 No 1, April 2005 and Vol 43 No 1, October 2008); combined gross enrolment ratio for Classes I – XII in the urban areas deteriorated from 92.19 percent in 1999-2000 to 87.75 percent in 2004-05 as per NSSO estimates.

The deterioration in the ranking of Meghalaya in HDI implies that the rate of development is slower than the rate in most of the states and hence many states have improved their ranking while Meghalaya has lagged behind.

In terms of the GDI, Meghalaya shows a much better position than most of the states of India. Subsequent chapters show that the health and educational attainments of women in Meghalaya are no better than their counterparts in the rest of the country. Therefore, the better GDI of Meghalaya is due to the fact that the female work participation rate in the state is relatively higher.

Among the Districts in the State, East Khasi Hills tops in HDI as well as GDI followed by West Garo Hills. The two major towns of the State are in these two Districts; and this analysis suggests that improvement in human development in Meghalaya is urban centric. East Garo Hills exhibits the lowest HDI. The HDI scale is a 0 to 1 scale and if we take 0.5 as the half way mark of development, then five districts out of seven fall short of that mark. Put another way, most of the districts have not achieved even half of what is supposed to be done in the basic areas of human development.

Chapter 3 discusses the health scenario in the State. The State has acute shortage of specialized manpower and proper basic health care facilities especially in the rural areas. There are concerns about the quality of service being provided to the people.

The key indicators of the status of health of the people of Meghalaya do not show a happy picture. For instance, in 2002-04, full Immunisation Coverage for Children 12 - 35 months of age was only 14 percent, Coverage of Full Ante-Natal Care for Pregnant Mothers was only 12 percent and only 35 percent of deliveries are attended by skilled persons. The same indicators for the other North Eastern States are much better. Significant inter district variations are also observed. Full Immunisation Coverage for Children 12 - 35 months of age and Coverage of Full Ante-Natal Care for Pregnant Mothers are very low in the three Districts of Garo Hills.

As per SRS survey, the IMR for Meghalaya in 2006 was 53. It is lower than the national average of 57. The rural IMR was 54 for Meghalaya, 62 for all India; urban IMR was 43 for Meghalaya and 39 for all India. Among the States in the North Eastern Region, Assam had the highest IMR of 67. The rest of the NE States showed IMRs that were lower than Meghalaya. Among the NE States, however, Meghalaya has the highest birth rate (24.7) and also the highest death rate (8.0) except Assam with death rate of 8.7 (SRS Bulletin, October 2007).

As per NFHS-3¹ (2005-06), the total fertility rate or number of children per woman in Meghalaya was 3.8. It has declined from 4.57 in 1998-99. However, it is much above the national average of 2.7. Other states with total fertility rate of 3 and above are Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland. The contraceptive prevalence rate for currently married women is the lowest at 24 percent in Meghalaya among all the States in India. The national average is 56 percent. It is highest in Himachal Pradesh at 73 percent followed by West Bengal at 71 percent. A state closer to Meghalaya's performance in this regard is Nagaland at 30 percent.

Unmet need for family planning among currently married women is 13 percent for the country as a whole. Among the states, the lowest is 5 percent in Andhra Pradesh and the highest is Meghalaya with 35 percent. In addition to Meghalaya, more than 20 percent of women have an unmet need for contraception in Nagaland, Jharkhand, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

At the all India level, as per NFHS-3, 52 percent of mothers had three or more Ante-Natal Care (ANC) visits. Meghalaya's figure is slightly above the national average at 53.4 percent. However, other indicators are below the national level. The percentage of births assisted by doctors/ nurses/ LHV/ ANM or other health personnel is 31.7 percent in Meghalaya; 47 percent for all India. The percentage of institutional births is 29.7 percent in Meghalaya; 39 percent for all India. The percentage of mothers who receive post natal care from doctors/ nurses/ LHV/ ANM or other health personnel is 28.8 percent in Meghalaya; 42 percent for all India. Besides, Meghalaya is among the states where the provision of IFA (iron and folic acid) supplements was far below the national average.

At the all India level 48 percent of children less than 5 years of age are stunted and 43 percent are underweight. Wasting is quite as serious problem in India, affecting 20 percent of children. In Meghalaya, 42 percent are stunted, 46 percent are underweight and 28 percent are wasted. These figures point to a very sad state of Undernutrition.

Anaemia is a very common problem in India. 79 percent of children aged 6-35 months are anemic in the country as a whole. In Meghalaya, the figure stands at 68.7 percent. NFHS-3 reports that although state differentials in the prevalence of anaemia are marked, a high prevalence of anaemia is found in every state.

Meghalaya, however, shows significantly lower levels of Undernutrition and Obesity among adult men and women. In Meghalaya 14 percent (36 percent in all India) of ever married women have BMI below normal. 8 percent (34 percent in all India) of ever married men have BMI below normal. In India, 15 percent of ever married women are overweight and obese. The figure is less than half of the all India average in Meghalaya at 7 percent.

Anaemia is a major health problem for adults as well as in children. It affects 55 percent of women and 24 percent of men in India. In Meghalaya too the problem is serious with significantly less gender differential. It affects 45.4 percent of ever married women aged 15-49 and 34.2 percent of ever married men aged 15-49 in Meghalaya. 56 percent of pregnant women in Meghalaya are anaemic. This leads to high prevalence of anaemia among children.

Chapter 4 focuses on education. The literacy rates are marginally lower in Meghalaya compared to the all India average. Rural literacy rates continue to be low. However, enrolment rates are higher in Meghalaya than the all India average. The gender gap in educational attainments is not very prominent in the state compared to the rest of the country. In a few districts, enrolment rates for girls are higher

¹Available at <http://www.nfhsindia.org>

than those for boys. The educational infrastructure leaves much to be desired especially in the rural areas.

In **Chapter 5** we address the issues of poverty. This chapter examines the literature on measurement of poverty with special reference to Meghalaya and identify the researchable issues that are relevant both for measurement of poverty and policy. It examines the incidence of poverty in Meghalaya and suggests certain measures for alleviation of poverty.

The official poverty ratios (as reported by the Planning Commission) are reported separately only for Assam from among the states in the NER. For remaining seven states in the region, i.e. including Meghalaya, the poverty ratios of Assam have been assigned. Therefore we do not have a firm and reliable basis on which to study the extent of poverty in Meghalaya. Another approach to measurement of poverty is the recently introduced Score Based Ranking which is used in the BPL (Below Poverty Line) Census conducted at the beginning of every Five Year Plan by the State Governments under the over all direction of the Ministry of Rural Development. However, the Poverty Line in this approach is not clearly defined.

However, there is no denying the fact that poverty in Meghalaya is widespread, especially in the rural areas. The household survey conducted by the State Government in 2002 finds that 49.9 percent of the households in Meghalaya are Below Poverty Line. Measurement of poverty critically depends on the poverty line definitions which should be current or access to goods and services besides assets on the score card or other socio-economic parameters that captures real situation and proper survey. The chapter suggests appointing a panel of experts to assess and devise a proper methodology and course of action to define and determine the people below poverty line at current level for Meghalaya. Further, state specific study would be desirable for any incisive analysis and direct action to eradicate poverty. To address the multifaceted face and challenge of poverty and deprivation we require a multifaceted approach involving policy and action.

Chapter 6 deals with the livelihood aspects, i.e., income and employment. There has been growth in the State Domestic Product and the Per Capita Income but there is not much evidence of the structural change associated with economic development. Majority of the people depend on agriculture for their livelihood, although the agricultural productivity is very low. The primary sector (Agriculture, Forestry and Logging, Fishing, Mining and Quarrying) contributes only 33 percent to the State Domestic Product in 1999-00. On the other hand, agriculture alone employs 63 percent of the main workers in 2001.

Work participation rates are declining over the years. This is the global trend since school attendance increases with development. Female work participation rates in Meghalaya are much higher compared to the all India average. As noted above, this partly explains the higher GDI of Meghalaya.

Unemployment and underemployment are on the rise. Unemployment among the educated youth is a matter of grave concern.

The Report also assesses the state of infrastructure in Meghalaya in **Chapter 7** since this is the base for economic development which in turn is necessary, though not sufficient, for human development. The chapter reflects the poor status of the infrastructural facilities, both economic and social infrastructure. While the infrastructure of the states in the northeast is generally poor compared to the rest of the country, that of Meghalaya is much worse compared to some of its neighbouring States. The analysis placed Meghalaya at the 6th position in the ranking of 7 North Eastern States. Further, in the last twenty years the gap in the relative availability of some of key infrastructural facilities like road, postal, irrigation and banking in Meghalaya compared to rest of the country has widened.

At the district level, the availability of infrastructure is skewed. East Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills

districts are comparatively well off in terms of availability of both economic and social infrastructure. Key infrastructural facilities are not available in a large number of villages. Also, wherever these infrastructural facilities are available, their quality is very poor.

There is a growing regional imbalance within the northeast in general and Meghalaya in particular in regards to both economic and social infrastructural facilities. Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve these facilities in Meghalaya, so also in other North Eastern States, and bring it at par with the rest of the country. Steps have to be taken to ensure an even spread of infrastructure to all the regions and districts of Meghalaya.

Gender related issues are discussed in **Chapter 8**. Gender issues assume special significance since the major tribes of Meghalaya follow a unique system of matriliney. The chapter discusses the gender roles and responsibilities in the traditional matrilineal system. It also points out the constraints and various emerging issues of the system.

Women in Meghalaya are better placed compared to their counterparts in the patrilineal societies. Women inherit the parents' property - acquired and ancestral. Women get the better share as the custodian of the property and the keeper of the home and hearth. For women coming from poor or landless families these property rights are meaningless. However, their responsibilities are no less than their landed counterparts.

When it comes to public life, the mindset and long-held views and attitude against women still pose a major obstacle for women to enter electoral politics. Authority in its real sense is the exclusive domain of men. Local administration is completely under the domain of men.

Women in Meghalaya suffer from problems of illiteracy, poverty and malnutrition, male drunkenness and family discord. Cases of domestic violence and sexual crimes also are not unheard of. These problems are universal and the prevalence of matrilineal system does not guarantee gender equality and absence of gender related discrimination.

The chapter also outlines some of the programmes undertaken to promote women's empowerment in the state. The achievement of these programmes has been minimal in terms of the number of beneficiaries. Much more needs to be done for upliftment of women, especially women belonging to the poor and vulnerable sections of the society.

Chapter 9 deals with environmental issues and management of natural resources. It looks at community participation and government intervention in this area. Among all the natural resources, forests contribute maximum to the state's economy. A large number of families in rural Meghalaya are exclusively dependent on forests for their sustenance. The dependency on the forests has been traditionally for shifting cultivation and restoring fertility of the fallows for future shifting cultivation. The forests have been the main source for collection of edible forest products for day to day livelihood. Besides these traditional forms of dependency, the forest farming using various horticultural species such as beetle nut, beetle vine, orange, bay leaf, plantation of cash crops like broomgrass and cashew nut, undertaking apiculture for honey are some of the modern day innovations of forest-based livelihood earning by the forest-dependent populations in the state.

The reduction in forest cover and erosion of natural resource base of the state have been directly impacting the livelihood options of millions of forest-dependents, who often do not have any other livelihood alternatives. Among the mineral resources, coal, limestone, uranium and quartz are the important ones, of which coal and limestone are being extracted in large quantities. The unregulated excessive coal mining has damaged the environment to a large extent in the state through forest

clearing, and increase in acidity of soil and water. The rural areas are badly affected by unscientific mining activities being carried out in different parts of the state.

Given the fact that most natural resources such as land, forest, mineral resources and water bodies belong to the people and the sixth schedule of the constitution protects their rights over these resources, the community participation models tried elsewhere in the country may not necessarily succeed here where people's participation is sought in government's programme to conserve natural resources mostly owned by the community or private individuals. There is a need to strengthen the traditional forest management mechanism through peripheral intervention. Regeneration efforts for the degraded areas and restoration of biodiversity-rich landscapes need to be initiated.

People's participation in the development process is discussed in **Chapter 10**. It discusses the different concepts of participation and examines the benefits that participation brings to development interventions. The chapter examines the extent and scope of People's participation in development plans of Meghalaya. An analysis of the role of the State Planning Board and the District Planning and Development Council (DPDC) is given.

The chapter also examines the structure of local self governance and its role in promoting participation in development in the state. Further it presents a case of a development project in the state which has adopted a participatory bottom up development approach where the beneficiaries of the project are at the centre of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Although the economic growth process in Meghalaya can not be called fully participatory, during the last few years some positive developments have happened in this field, particularly in the spheres of credit market, labour market and product market. The growth and spread of SHGs (Self Help Groups) and development Non-government organisations (NGOs) in the state is a welcome sign for making the growth process participatory.

Chapter 11 is devoted to quality of governance, decentralization and institutional reforms. One of the biggest challenges of achieving human development is governance. Political governance in the State is in one way different, and also very intricate and complex. The complexity of governance is because of the existence of more than one political authority.

The chapter highlights the authority, contributions and challenges of each of the constituents of the three-tier political administration: the State Legislative Assembly and its modern bureaucratic organisation, the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs), and the Traditional Institutions. The complexity of political governance due to existence of three separate political bodies and each wanting to control the other has caused tension and strain between them. The fundamental cause is located in the Constitutional provisions, and it is the Constitution that legitimizes the existence of three political institutions. Two of these institutions (The State Legislative Assembly and the Autonomous District Council) are based on modern democratic principles whose members are elected on the principle of adult franchise, the structure is modern-bureaucratic organisation, and function is defined by rules and regulations. The third institution (i.e., traditional institutions) is based on customary beliefs and practices, and traditions. They are involved and engaged in economic development, administration of justice, and regulating social order. The only difference is that traditional institutions have to function within the given rules and regulations of the Autonomous District Council and the State Government, and the State Government law prevails over the laws of the District Councils. Ultimately it is the authority of the State Government that prevails, and overwhelmingly determining the process of development in the State. It seems that governance in Meghalaya is decentralised but in actual reality it is not.

As far as economic governance is concerned, the State has been implementing various schemes for the last thirty six years. It has over the years also received additional advantage in the form of

financial assistance from Central Government. However, the fruits of development are not reaped by all sections of the society. Further, village – government linkage is generally low.

Chapter 11 also proposes a model of ‘Village Participatory Development Planning’ to enable and ensure the participation of the poor to enhance quality of life. The suggested reforms, when implemented, will go a long way to bring about human development to the hitherto backward rural population.

The last chapter, i.e. **Chapter 12** outlines the Way Forward as we continue to strive for better living conditions and larger choices for the people of the state of Meghalaya. It outlines various concrete steps to be taken in the near future for promoting human development. The approach that is called for is a holistic one.

Development of infrastructure; improvement of health care services; increasing the number of quality schools and skill development centres; developing alternative and sustainable means of livelihood; and participatory development strategy are major areas that should be given top priority and utmost importance for promoting human development in Meghalaya. The real challenge, however, is to bring the benefits of development to the backward and poor sections of the society, especially the remote rural areas. Reforms in governance are a must to enable and ensure the participation of the poor to enhance quality of life.

1.3 Meghalaya: A Profile²

1.3.1 GENERAL INFORMATION ON LOCATION, POPULATION, POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION AND ECONOMY

Meghalaya emerged as a full-fledged State within the Union of India on 21st January 1972. ‘Meghalaya’ (not an indigenous name) meaning ‘abode of clouds’ reflects the salubrity of its climate. The wettest places in the world are also located here. The state has an area of 22429 sq. km. and is located between 24°45’ North latitudes and 26°15’ North latitudes and 89°45’ and 93° East longitudes. The temperature varies from 2 degrees Celsius to 35 degrees Celsius depending upon the altitude which varies in hills from 300 metres to 2000 metres above mean sea level. It has predominantly hilly terrain with foothills as plains and flood-prone areas.

It is bounded by the Brahmaputra valley of Assam in the North and Northwest and Cachar area of Assam in the East; the Surma valley (Bangladesh) borders it in the South and partly in the South West. Meghalaya has about 443 Kms. of international border with Bangladesh. The capital of Meghalaya, Shillong was also undivided Assam’s capital from 1874 till January 1972. Shillong is located at an altitude of 1496 metres above mean sea level.

The State has a population of 2318822 as per the 2001 census of which 80.4 percent live in the rural areas. The overall population density of 103 (324 all India) per sq. km. has shown increase as against 15 per sq. km. in 1901. The sex ratio continuously declined from 1036 in 1901 to 937 in 1961. Since then it shows an upward trend and stands at 972 in 2001.

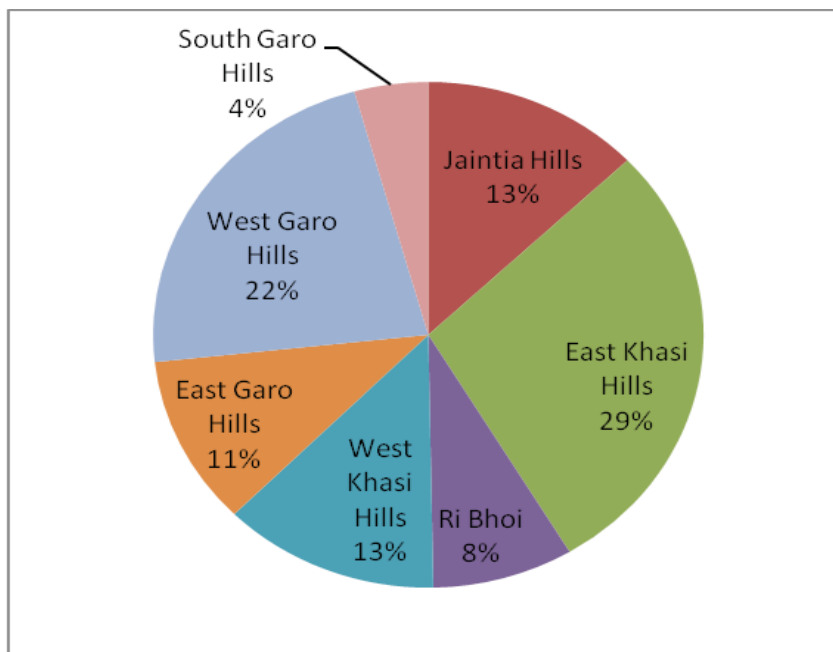
²This section is adapted from Shreerajan (2006), Chapter 2.

Table 1.1 Administrative Districts in Meghalaya

Name of the District	Head quarters	Area (sq. km.)	Population (2001 census)	Density of population per sq. km.	Sex ratio
Jaintia Hills	Jowai	3819	299108	78	996
East Khasi Hills	Shillong	2820	660923	241	981
Ri Bhoi	Nongpoh	2376	192790	79	941
West Khasi Hills	Nongstoin	5247	296049	56	968
East Garo Hills	Williamnagar	2603	250582	96	966
West Garo Hills	Tura	3715	518390	141	968
South Garo Hills	Baghmara	1849	100980	54	942
Meghalaya	Shillong	22429	2318822	103	972

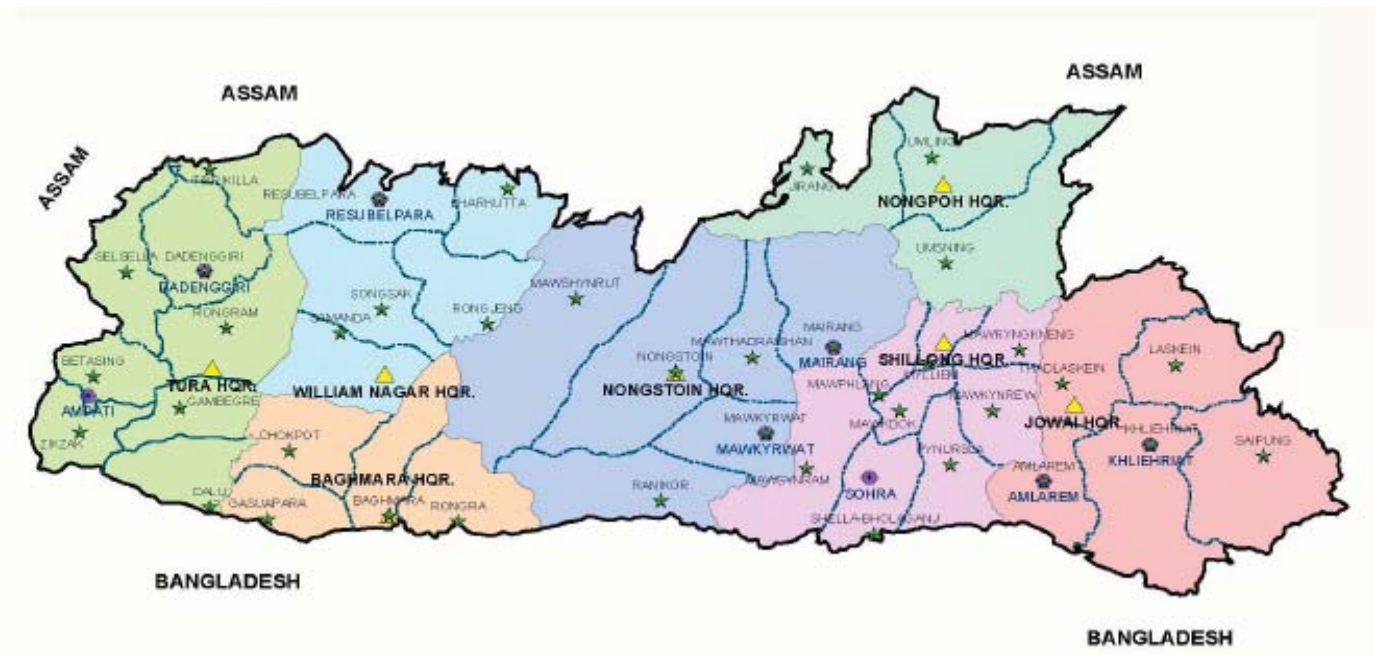
Source: Census of India, 2001.

Figure 1.1: Population Share of Each District of Meghalaya (2001 Census)



Principal languages are Khasi and Garo, with English as official language in the State. With originally two districts and three subdivisions only, the state has now 7 administrative districts (Table 1.1). Besides these, in order to bring administration closer to the people, it has now 8 subdivisions and 39 Blocks (7 new Blocks have been created in 2002, one in each district).

Map 1.1: Administrative Map of Meghalaya



Source: State GIS Lab (Meghalaya)

The State has a unicameral legislature, consisting of 60 members (29 Khasi Hills, 7 Jaintia Hills and 24 Garo Hills). In addition, there are three Autonomous District Councils in the State, namely, Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council and Garo Hills Autonomous District Council. These councils function in accordance with the provisions of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India. The Autonomous District Councils are democratic institutions which have powers to make laws mainly in respect of 1. land, other than reserved forests; 2. forests, other than reserved forests; 3. use of any land or water resources for agricultural purposes; 4. regulation of Jhum or shifting cultivation; 5. town or village administration including village or town police, public health and sanitation; 6. appointment and succession of chiefs and their powers; 7. laws relating to inheritance of properties and their regulation; 8. marriage; 9. social customs, traditional practices and customary laws.

There has been a growing debate over the relevance of Autonomous District Councils, which were created as an institution to allow management of natural resources and to protect, reform and pursue customary practices, when there was no separate state for hill regions of Assam. Even with the creation of a full-fledged state, the district council continues to function as a constitutional entity and, for quite some time, has been treated as a state within the state. Though it might have served the initial purpose, in respect of management of resources and codifying the customary laws, particularly in the wake of fast changes society is encountering, its record of accomplishment has given rise to certain misgivings in most quarters. However, it does provide a platform of political training in the state. With the Panchayati Raj Act brought in as another constitutional safeguard, and with devolution of power to the grassroots, an opportunity awaits to evolve a mechanism for correcting the imbalances in the power structure by incorporating mechanisms for more effective decentralization of duties and responsibilities as also for participation in policies and programmes.

Shillong has a bench of the High Court. The North Eastern Council (NEC) serving under the Union Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER), Government of India co-ordinates and accommodates infrastructure and production based schemes of intra-regional and inter-state interests. There is an earmarking of 10 percent of the budgetary allocation of sectors in GOI for expenditure in NER. Shortfall on this count forms the Non Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCP) for high value

projects of infrastructure and social development for the states in the region. NLCPR is coordinated by the ministry of DONER. Several Central Government, Military, Para-Military establishments are also located in the State, primarily in and around Shillong.

The population of Meghalaya is predominantly tribal. The main tribes are Khasis, Jaintias and Garos, besides other plain tribes such as Koch, Rabhas, and Bodos, etc. The Khasis, (including the Khyntriams, Jaintias, the Bhois, the Wars who are sometimes called the Hynniewtrep as a group) predominantly inhabit the districts towards Eastern part of Meghalaya, belong to the Proto Austroloid Monkhmer race and have been indigenous in these hills for a long time. The western part of the state, the Garo Hills, is predominantly inhabited by the Garos. The Garos belong to the Bodo family of the Tibeto-Burman race. They are also an indigenous population, said to have migrated from Tibet in its racial dispersal. The Garos are also called 'Achiks'. Garo and Khasi societies have a matri-lineal system.

81 percent of the population of the State live in rural areas and are dependent on agriculture for livelihood. The State has a total of 5782 inhabited villages (2001 census). Its population growth during the last decade (1981-1991) showed an increase of 31.80 percent. During 1991-2001 the annual growth of population is 2.29 percent against national rate of 2.14 percent. However, decadal variation in population of the state reveals an increase in the post-independence era which could be owing to a multiplicity of factors including influx, better health facility and reduction in mortality, etc.

The State has rich natural resources including diverse, dense, endemic, and cultivated exotic flora, ranging from tropical and sub-tropical to temperate or near-temperate kind, sustained by heavy and long rains. Dense Forest cover is about 42 percent of the total area; however, much of it is private forest managed and controlled by the District Council. The State Government controls only the area under the reserved forest, which is about 4 percent of the forest areas. There have been reports of large felling of trees in the 80s and 90s leading to consequential problems of livelihood and environmental degradation with consequential fall out on natural conservation. Currently, under the directions of the Supreme Court of India, felling and movement of timber is restricted to the extent of fulfillment of certain conditions. The State also has rich mineral resources; much of it is exploited unscientifically as most of it is under private ownership.

The State receives the heaviest rainfall (varies from 2300mm to more than 14000mm; average annual rainfall is 12000mm) and has vast potential for exploiting water resources for irrigation, hydropower and fisheries; but its efforts in this direction have been inadequate and at best, can be regarded as moderate. Scientific exploitation of natural resources will require detailed resource inventory and heavy initial investments. Responses in this direction from Government have not been adequate to provide stimulus for the growth and development of the State. The State could not attract investment from outside as there is no conducive environment and the sensitivity shown by the local community towards the investment from outside the region, due to the historical and perceived reasons, is also another reason for lower investments in various potential areas of development.

Though there has been some improvement, the state has a long way to go in respect of basic services to improve health, education and economy, when judged by the parameters of the Human Development Index and other socio-economic indicators. Among the States and UTs in the country, Meghalaya ranked 26th in Human Development Index (HDI) in 2005 (refer chapter 2), 21st in Index of social and economic infrastructure, 16th in per capita consumption of electricity, 25th in road density, 30th in per capita utilization of credit, 21st in per capita income in 2004-05 (Economic Survey, 2007-08), 28th in Infant Mortality Rate (SRS Bulletin, October 2008) and 27th in Literacy Rate (Census of India, 2001).

As such, the State has to take appropriate steps to improve its position in all sectors. It is also ironical that motor vehicles per thousand population in the state is 40, whereas primary school per thousand is only 3 and hospital beds per lakh population is 137. Besides, there is astonishing disparity in rural and urban area parameters.

1.3.2 SOME UNIQUE SOCIO ECONOMIC FEATURES OF THE NORTH EASTERN REGION AND OF MEGHALAYA

In a region so diverse, yet interrelated in its characteristics, it will be dangerous to make generalizations. However, basic features of the region can be briefly mentioned as below to get some perspectives on issues that apply to the region in general, and Meghalaya in particular.

- 1) Diversity in geological, physiographic, agro-ecological and climatic variations: The region has six agro-climatic sub-zones (5 sub-zones in Meghalaya). Contrasting variations exist, for example in Khasi and Jaintia Hills on one hand and Garo Hills areas on the other in most of these respects.
- 2) Abundant water resources: The region has abundance of water resources, the potential is not fully harnessed for hydro-power, fishery, ecotourism, adventure tourism and cave tourism. In Meghalaya, heaviest rainfall needs to be utilized for harvesting and recharging its aquifers. Its perennial streams and swollen rivers are strong water resources begging for potential tapping. Its total ground water potential of 1226.44 million cubic meter (MCM) provide only 1041.99MCM as utilizable for irrigation and at around 3000 MW of which only 185.2 MW has been tapped so far.
- 3) Abode of Bio-Diversity: The NE region contains about 20-25 percent of the forest cover of the country; and is the richest for bio-diversity. It is an ecological `hot spot`-with 51 types of forest, 35 endemic plant genera, 2500 flowering plant species, 600 varieties of orchids out of 1500 present in India; also, out of the 500 different species of mammals known in India at least 160 are from the region while around 65 percent of mammalian genera recorded in India, are found in the region (IFAD, 1995). The State of Meghalaya is home to nearly 300 orchid varieties. The State also boasts of 450 species of birds and 110 species of mammals. The State also claims to be the abode of 700 odd varieties of medicinal plants. In Meghalaya, 40 endemic species out of 115 plant species from 67 families are threatened with extinction; and 6 species are endangered; 30 types of orchids are currently threatened with extinction; and 6 species are endangered; 30 types of orchids are currently threatened (IFAD, 1995).The State is home to some of the rare varieties of paddy, banana, and citrus plants, and is a storehouse of diverse germ-plasm reserve.
- 4) A predominantly agricultural economy with 80 percent population dependent on it and only about 11 percent of the land area being under cultivation. The broad pattern of rainfall varies from 2200 mm-14500 mm with varied temperature range of 2°C to 38°C.The low consumption of fertilizer (NPK 27:12:1 as against 4:2:1) could become its strength by promoting organic and natural farming if well packaged and practiced. Besides agriculture, the allied activities of fishery, livestock, piggery, poultry, and sericulture has immense potential strength. The region has good tradition of handicrafts and weaving.
- 5) Rich in mineral resources: The State is rich in coal, limestone, clay and kaolin, uranium and silimanite, besides phospherite, glass sand, granite, quartz and feldspar. The estimated reserve of coal and limestone is 640 million tones and 5000 million tones respectively. The production of coal in 2003-04 was about 5.4 million tones of which 0.88 million tones were exported to Bangladesh; production of limestone in the same year was 0.72 million tones of which 0.18 million tones were exported to Bangladesh. These figures may be a conservative estimate (at

least by 50 percent) owing to revenue leakages/implications and underhand play in the sector including the transport business involved in the sector.

- 6) The region has 98 percent of its borders as international boundaries with China, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar (IFAD, 1995). Hence, its sensitivities and vulnerability to external forces for the security and integrity of the country is understandable.
- 7) A mosaic of ethnic and cultural diversity presents a social landscape of Aryans, Dravidians, Indo-Burmese, Indo-Tibetan, Proto-Austroloid and other stocks. In NER, there are 217 recognizable tribes, more than 100 with significant population (IFAD, 1995). There are more than 75 major population groups and subgroups speaking approximately 400 language and dialects (Madhav, 1998)
- 8) A high population growth mainly due to influx across the southern boundaries (also Natural) straining demographic and social texture, and causing 'fear of losing identity' (Madhav, 1998) and livelihood among a considerable section of the indigenous/local populace.
- 9) Traditional trade linkage in the pre-independence era with East (Myanmar) and South (present day Bangladesh) and its severance subsequently has generated a demand and need to have access to Bangladesh and Calcutta and the opening of border trade with neighbouring countries.
- 10) The way of life and society is rooted in a traditional and customary approach in the hills. Traditional land tenure systems prevail without elaborate documentation and survey in hills and in Meghalaya. System of Matrilineal society is prevalent among the Meghalaya's chief tribes.
- 11) Feeling of isolation and alienation: Owing to the British policies and subsequent political interests and owing to slow pace of developmental efforts.
- 12) Sparse population in hills and poor basic infrastructure, hill area specificities of isolation, marginality, ecological and ethnological vulnerability, and heterogeneity of socio-economic factors.
- 13) A rapid spread of Christianity, particularly among tribal communities in the hills;
- 14) Active youth movement; and a disturbed law and order situation. Mizoram and Meghalaya, however, are relatively peaceful.

1.3.3 PERCEIVED PROBLEMS BY PEOPLE IN THE REGION/STATE

It may be desirable to appreciate and enlist what people, mostly educated and opinion makers articulate as the difficulties and problems faced by the populace in the region.

- Psychological fear of losing identity due to influx and immigration;
- Disruption of law and order; insurgency, vicious circle of economic stagnation and breeding of violence; realization of futility of an armed terrorist struggle and necessity of stable and secured environment is gaining ground to some extent and in some areas;
- Lack of an integrated vision for progress and development;
- Severance of its natural markets across eastern and southern, and to some extent, northern borders; the region was uniquely disadvantaged by partition;
- Necessity to restructure the institutional arrangements and infrastructures associated with the policy-making decisions in the NER;
- Primitive agricultural economy, shifting cultivation in hills, low productivity and lack of market linkages. 'The productive sectors like agriculture is showing a negative trend' (Madhav, 1998) in the region;

- Absence of genuine and fruitful productive exercise - a condition of inaction or slow action or absence of work culture;
- Development agenda not in terms of social structure; lack of genuine participation in planning, policy and decision making; the linkages of people's institutions with governance has been weak to adversarial, lack of meaningful relationships;
- Lack of proper understanding of the society, culture and polity, and within that structure the problem of evolving location specific responses; and
- Absence of resources-management perspective for ecological security and sustainable development.
- Absence or dysfunction of tertiary level institutions such as district councils, panchayats, village council and reluctance of states to share resources and functions has created disillusionment in the NER (Madhav, 1998).
- Faulty formulation and implementation of plans and programmes; sick public sector undertakings owing to mismanagement; absence of basic requirements, despite heavy assistance from the center, including justice; and 'pervasive corruption' (Madhav, 1998) are problems frequently mentioned seeking redressal.

1.3.4 PROBLEMS: OTHER ADDED DIMENSIONS IN MEGHALAYA

- ❖ The issues and the process of accommodation and consensus of diverse interest groups: such as absence of consensus on resource management and required approach towards land, forest and water management including desirable reforms in these areas for people centered and progress oriented policies.
- ❖ An environment of cautious approach of governance which may mean inaction, or slow-action; or weighed action, sometimes vested or interested action or even inaction.
- ❖ Non-institutional consultations, mainly personality-based consultations resulting in mushrooming of floating organisations and assertions, each trying to outdo or overdo others; alienation of traditional systems from decision making and governance.
- ❖ Inadequate focus on development and poor community participation.
- ❖ Barring a few recently evolved NGOs there is a dearth of experienced and capable developmental NGO in the state. Poor organizational capacities of NGO sector including traditional organizations.
- ❖ Absence of effective programmes to channel the energies of youth, towards adventure-some but socially fruitful political, academic and economic pursuits.
- ❖ Dilemmas of development: 'assimilation versus assertion'. "The old ways have been smashed; the new ways are not viable. People are caught in the deadlock of development..... they are expatriates in their own country.....forced to get by in the no man's land between tradition and modernity" (Sachs, 1992).
- ❖ Tokenism in development reflected by.
 - o Absence of location specific solutions in view of diversity and lack of involvement of people for mutual learning;
 - o Mostly inappropriate techniques and technology;
 - o Inadequate investment both by government and private organizations or in joint sectors;

- o Poor extension support and backward and forward linkages in developmental sectors;
- o Centralized planning; and lack of meaningful experimentation; initiating non adapted programmes, slow to lack lustre implementation, and abandoning programmes without meaningful impact studies (IRDP), pervasive adhocism.
- o Institutional failures or inadequacy of safeguards for indigenous people.
- o 'Blaming attitude' and 'lack of commitment' to serve the people in indigenous middle class and elite.
- o New economic activities, marginalization of rural populace; spread of more western-consumerist life style and aspirations, increasing competitions and usurpation of resources and opportunities.
- o Lack of reforms and efforts to revise traditional laws for changing with times. For example, in view of matrilineal system the status of male child and inheritance rights becomes a ticklish issue of identity, etc. in Meghalaya. On the other hand, democratic full participation of women in decision making in family and affairs of village remains a challenging task. Further, land reforms, ceiling, individual and farming rights, etc. have hardly been attended to for a meaningful resolution.
- o Emergence of an exploitative and pervasive culture; intermediaries in power and market centres; quick money culture and extortion.
- o Lack of effective decentralization and empowerment efforts.

1.3.5 SUMMING UP

The brief profile of Meghalaya discussed in the foregoing subsections serves as a background against which we evaluate achievements in the sphere of human development. All the subsequent chapters of this Report paint a somewhat subdued picture of the level of human development in the State. The features and problems outlined above are largely the underlying causes for this under development. Meghalaya may be considered to be a case of unfulfilled potential in many ways. The rich natural resource base and the human resource base of the state have been under utilised. Therefore, the challenge ahead is to harness the resources to the full potential and more importantly, to bring the fruits of development to the people, especially the poor and the less privileged.